

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 /036 W
-----017510 141113Z /11
R 131907Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4785

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USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, FR
SUBJECT: THE FRENCH LABOR SCENE: SOME TEMPORARY
EASING OF TENSIONS

REF: A) PARIS 19566 B) PARIS 19373

1. SUMMARY: LABOR TROUBLES HAVE EASED AS THE VACATION
DOLDRUMS SETTLE IN AND SOME AGREEMENTS ARE SIGNED.
BUT THE PRESENT RESPITE APPEARS TEMPORARY, AND THE FALL
PROMISES TO BE LIVELY. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH JULY, THE SACROSANCT FRENCH VACATION SEASON
BEGAN, AND THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED TAPERING OFF OF
LABOR UNREST. THE STRIKES AT RENAULT ARE OVER, AND THE
GOVERNMENT HAS SETTLED WITH THE UNIONS AT THE ARSENALS
(SEE REFS). MORE IMPORTANT STILL, PROGRESS HAS BEEN
MADE IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR NEGOTIATIONS.
AS A RESULT, THERE IS A CONSENSUS AMONGST OBSERVERS
OF THE FRENCH LABOR SCENE THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR
TROUBLE THIS SUMMER ARE NOW SLIGHT, AND GROWING
PROGRESSIVELY MORE SO AS THE AUGUST DOLDRUMS APPROACH.

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3. THE PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN RAPID
AND STRIKING, PARTICULARLY IN THE PUBLIC AND NATIONA-
LIZED SECTORS WHERE THE GOVERNMENT HAS DIRECT
CONTROL OVER THE COURSE OF EVENTS AND HAS BEEN SETTING
THE PACE. AGREEMENTS HAVE BEEN SIGNED WITH THE
REFORMISTS AND THE TEACHERS' UNIONS FOR THE CIVIL
SERVICE; AND WITH THE REFORMIST AND AUTONOMOUS

RAILWAYMEN'S UNIONS. (SIMILARLY, THE GOVERNMENT MOVED QUICKLY TO HEAD OFF THE THREAT OF FO-LED TROUBLE IN THE PTT BY GIVING ASSURANCES THAT THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM WAS NOT GOING TO BE SPLIT OFF FROM THE POSTAL SERVICE AND MADE INTO A SEMI-PRIVATE CORPORATION. FOR SOME REASON, THIS EVENT HAS BEEN IGNORED BY THE PRESS.) IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, THERE HAS ALSO BEEN PROGRESS, WITH AGREEMENTS REACHED ON BASIC WAGES IN A NUMBER OF INDUSTRIES (THESE ARE NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE, THE SMIC, OVER WHICH THE GOVERNMENT STILL REFUSES TO NEGOTIATE).

4. THESE SIGNS OF PROGRESS, HOWEVER, ARE SOURED, SOMEWHAT BY THE FAILURE OF THE CFDT AND THE REFUSAL OF THE CGT SO FAR TO SIGN ANY MAJOR AGREEMENT. THIS SITUATION IS TROUBLESOME BUT NOT UNEXPECTED. MANY OF THE CFDT'S COMPONENT UNIONS ARE CONTROLLED BY THOSE WHO ARE EITHER UNRECONCILED TO THE UNION'S DECISION TO DROP POLITICS FOR NEGOTIATIONS, OR WHO ARE UNWILLING TO COMPROMISE. THE UNION'S NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER, SHOWS EVERY SIGN OF TRYING TO REACH AN AGREEMENT IN THE ONE AREA WHERE IT IS NOW NEGOTIATING WITH

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THE PATRONAT (A REFORM OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION SYSTEM); AND THE NATIONAL FEDERATION MOST CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE NEW POLICY (THE METALWORKERS) IS ALSO CLEARLY TRYING TO REACH AN INDUSTRY AGREEMENT

WITH THE EMPLOYERS.

5. FOR ITS PART, THE CGT HAS BEEN PURSUING A PRE-DICTABLE LINE OF SELECTIVELY SIGNING SOME MINOR AGREEMENTS, WHILE DENOUNCING THE TERMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OTHERS. IT IS ALSO TRYING TO DO ALL IN ITS POWER TO PERSUADE THE CFDT UNIONS TO FOLLOW ITS LEAD AND MAINTAIN A SOLID FRONT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. THIS, IN TURN, HAS PROVOKED SOME SHARP CRITICISM OF THE CGT'S POLITICAL OBJECTIVES FROM SOME OF THE CFDT LEADERS, AND IN PARTICULAR, THE HEAD OF THE METALWORKERS.

6. LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FALL, HOWEVER, THERE IS SOME REASON FOR CONCERN, AND IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CGT OR CFDT. PRICES ARE RISING, AND WILL RISE HIGHER STILL; AND THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IS DETERIORATING: THE UNEMPLOYED JOB SEEKERS ARE INCREASINGLY FORMERLY EMPLOYED PERSONS AS OPPOSED

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TO LABOR MARKET ENTRANTS; ANOTHER WAVE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WILL ENTER THE JOB MARKET THIS SEPTEMBER; SEVERAL GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED MAJOR EMPLOYERS HAVE ANNOUNCED LAY-OFFS OR MAY EVEN CLOSE; AND THE GENERAL ECONOMIC SITUATION SUGGESTS THAT NO RELIEF IS IN SIGHT. AS A RESULT, BOTH TRADE UNIONISTS AND EMPLOYERS TELL US THAT THERE IS A GOOD LIKELIHOOD OF LABOR TROUBLE THIS FALL. IN THAT CONNECTION, MANY OBSERVERS HAVE TAKEN SPECIAL NOTE OF THE RECENT (AND STILL SMOLDERING) STRIKES AT THE MOULINEX KITCHEN EQUIPMENT PLANTS IN NORMANDY. WHAT THEY FIND SO INTERESTING ABOUT THAT WELL-PUBLICIZED EPISODE IS THAT IT MARKED, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG WHILE, THE WILLINGNESS OF PRIVATE SECTOR WORKERS TO RISK THEIR JOBS IN AN ECONOMIC STRIKE. THIS IS INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF RISING WORKER COMBATIVITY, WHICH MAY SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE ECONOMY ONCE SUMMER ENDS.
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